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THE VAULT OF HORROR

HORROR

FEATURING...

THE VAULT-KEEPER

THE OLD WITCH

THE CRYPT-KEEPER

JOHN CRAIG

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THE VAULT OF HORROR!

HEH, HEH! *STATUE*, FRIENDS? HOW PERFECTLY *AWFUL* IT IS TO BE STARING INTO YOUR LEERING, EXPECTANT FACES AGAIN! IT ALMOST *FRIGHTENS* ME! *ALMOST*.. BUT NOT QUITE, FOR LIVING HERE IN THE *VAULT*, I'VE BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO *TERRIFYING* SIGHTS! ANYWAY... I HOPE YOU'RE READY FOR A *GRUESOME* YARN THAT OUGHT TO TICKLE YOUR *FANCY!* IT'S A REAL *CHILLER* THAT'LL KEEP YOU GUESSING! I CALL IT,

SILVER THREADS AMONG THE MOLD!

SOMEWHERE A TOWER CLOCK INTONED THE HOUR OF MIDNIGHT. IN HIS STUDIO, CEDRIC HARRINGTON WORKED INTENTLY, MODELING THE FINAL TOUCHES ON HIS LATEST STATUE..

CEONIC MOVED BACK TO SURVEY HIS WONK. A SATISFIELO BMILE CAME TO HIS FACE AND HE PUT OOWN HIS TOOLS...
WONOERFUL! ONE OF MY BEST! ALL RIGHT, CHNISTINE... YOU CAN RELAX NOW!
IN THE CORNER OF THE ROOM, A BEAUTIFUL NEO-HAINED GIRL STEPPEO OOWN FNOM THE MOOEL'S STANO AND OORNEO A LIGHT ROBE...
ALL OONE, CEORIC?
YES! IT'S JUST LIKE YOU! I'LL SET A BOOD PNICE FON IT, OEAN! I'LL BUY YOU SOME-THING NICE!
YOU'RE A OANLING, CEONIC, TO BUY ME SO MANY THINGS!
WHY BHOULON'T I BUY YOU GIFTS? WITHOUT YOU TO GIVE ME INSPIRATION, MY STATUES WOULO BE LIFELESS!
I LOVE YOU SO MUCH, CHNISTINE! IF YOU EVEN LEFT ME, I'O GO INSANE! WHEN WILL YOU MARRY ME? YOU SAIO WE'O BE MANNIEO SOMEDAY!
YES, OEAN... SOMEDAY! BUT NOT NOW! BE PATIENT!
(SIGH! IT'S BO EASY FON YOU TO SAY THAT! YOU DON'T KNOW THE TORMENT I FEEL! YOU ..
NOW OON'T GET EXCITED, GEORIC! IT'S LATE AND I WANT TO GET ORESSED!
CHRISTINE SLIPPEO FNOM HIS GRASP ANO OISAP-PEARED BEHIND A BCNEEN TO ORESB. THE SCULPTON BISHEO RESIGNEDLY ANO GAZEO FONOLY AT THE FIBUNE HE HAO CNEATED. HE CANESSED IT TENOENLY...
CHRISTINE, YOU WILL COME TOMORROW, WON'T YOU? I'LL HAVE A SURPNISE FOR YOU!
A SURPRISE? WHY, OF COUNBE I'LL BE HERE! IS IT THAT ENMIRE WRAP I SAIO I WANTEO? TELL ME!
A FEW MOMENTS LATEN, THE RED-HEAO STEPPEO FNOM BEHINO THE BCNEEN, FULLY CLOTHEO...
NO, NO! I WON'T TELL YOU ANYTNING! YOU'LL BEE TOMORROW!
YOU'NE SO BWEET TO ME, CEONIC! I'LL BE HERE EARLY TOMONNOW! GOOD NIGHT, OEAN!
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LATE THE FOLLOWING MORRING, SHE ARRIVED AT THE STUDIO. THE SCULPTOR USHERED HER IN EXCITEDLY...

COME IN, DARLING! I'VE BEER WAITING FOR YOU! WHAT KEPT YOU?

I'M *SO* SORRY, CEDRIC, *DEAR!* I OVERSLEPT! WHERE'S THE SURPRISE?

THERE!

THERE ???

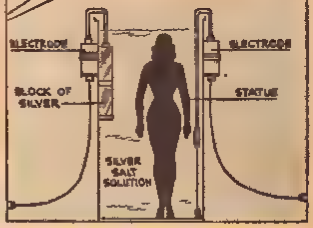
WHAT'S ALL *THAT* JUNK?

IT'S ROT *JUNK!* THESE ARE THE MATERIALS I HEED TO BEGIN THE MOST IMPORTAHT JOB OF MY CAREER!

THIS IS THE *BIG SURPRISE* YOU HAD FOR ME?

CERTAINLY! I'M GOIRG TO OO A *LIFE-SIZE* STATUE OF YOU, CHRISTINE!... ARO THEH I'M GOIHG TO *PLATE IT WITH SILVER!* COME.. .I'LL SHOW YOU HOW IT WORKS!

IT'S SIMPLE! THIS VAT IS FILLED WITH A *SILVER SALT* SOLUTION! THE STATUE IS PLACED IH THE VAT ATTATCHED TO AR ELECTRODE! A *BLOCK* OF *SILVER* IS ALSO PLACED IN THE SOLUTIOR ARD HOOKED UP IN THE SAME MANRER TO THE *OTHER* ELECTRODE! THEN YOU TURR ON THE CURRERT!



MIRUTE PARTICLES LEAVE THE BLOCK OF SILVER, TRAVEL THROUGH THE SOLUTIOH AHD ARE DEPOSITED ON THE STATUE! IH A SHORT TIME, THE STATUE IS *COMPLETELY COATED WITH SILVER!* ISR'T IT *WONDERFUL?*

OH, SURE... POSITIVELY AMAZING...

HEH,HEH,HEH! CEDRIC WAS SO EHTHUSED WITH HIS ELECTROPLATIHG OUTFIT THAT HE HEVER EVER ROTICED CHRISTINE'S OISAPPOIHTMENT! IN THE REXT FEW DAYS HE MADE SKETCHES ARD STUDIES FOR THE STATUE THAT WAS TO BE HIS GREAT MASTERPIECE! AT LAST WORK WAS BEBUN...

ONE DAY, SEVERAL WEEKS LATER, CEDRIC HAD TO LEAVE THE STUDIO FOR A WHILE.. AND WHEN HE RETURNED, HE HEARD CHRISTINE SPEAKING TO SOMEONE ON THE PHONE...
YES ..YES, I'LL MEET YOU TONIGHT, AT THE USUAL PLACE! I HAVE TO HANG UP NOW! YES ALL RIGHT! 'BYE!
MEET SOMEONE? USUAL PLACE? HMM I WONDER WHO...
SUSPICIOUS, CEDRIC WAITED A FEW MINUTES BEFORE ENTERING.. BUT WHEN THE DAY'S WORK WAS FINISHED AND CHRISTINE HAD LEFT, HE FOLLOWED.
CHRISTINE DOESN'T LIVE IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD! WAIT! SHE'S TURNING INTO THE PARK!
KEEPING WELL HIDDEN, CEDRIC SAW HER ARRIVE AT A SECLUDED SPOT WHERE A MAN WAITED ...
WHA ...! HE'S TAKING HER IN HIS ARMS! SHE'S KISSING HIM!! THAT..THAT TWO-TIMING WITCH!
TREMBLING WITH ANGER, HE CREPT NEARER...
OH, GARY.. IF WE DIDN'T MEET EVERY NIGHT, I COULDN'T STAND BEING WITH CEDRIC ALL DAY!
DON'T WORRY, HONEY! WE'LL BE MARRIED SOON, AND YOU'LL NEVER HAVE TO SEE HIM AGAIN!
IF HE WEREN'T SO GENEROUS WITH MONEY AND GIFTS, I THINK I'D SPIT IN HIS FACE EVERY TIME HE COMES NEAR ME!
I KNOW..
..BUT BY HOCKING AND SELLING THOSE GIFTS, WE ADDED A NICE PIECE OF CHANGE TO OUR BANK ACCOUNT, BABY!
WE HAVE ENOUGH, GARY! WE CAN BE MARRIED NOW! LET'S NOT WAIT ANY LONGER!
OKAY, CHRIS! TOMORROW NIGHT! TRY TO GET CEDRIC TO GIVE YOU ONE MORE LARGE GIFT...CASH! THEN WE'LL TAKE OFF AND NEVER COME BACK!
OH, DARLING! AT LAST! I'M SO HAPPY!
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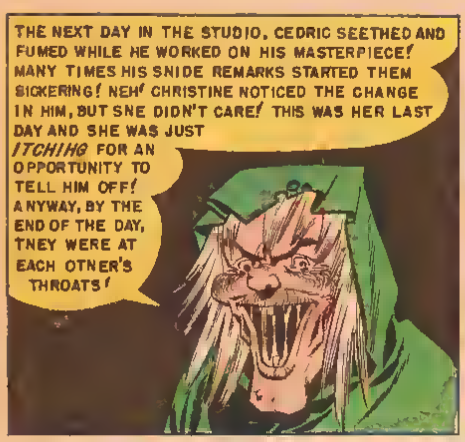
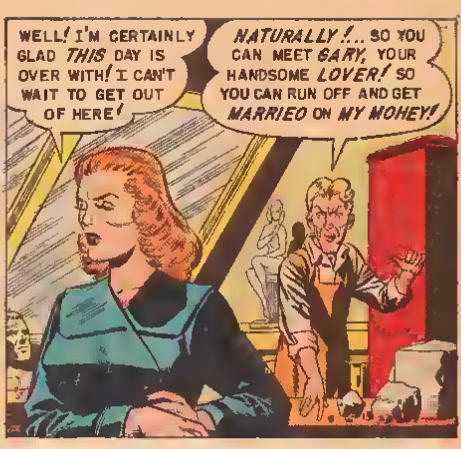

THE NEXT DAY IN THE STUDIO, CEDRIC SEETHED AND FUMED WHILE HE WORKED ON HIS MASTERPIECE! MANY TIMES HIS SNIDE REMARKS STARTED THEM SICKERING! NEH! CHRISTINE NOTICED THE CHANGE IN HIM, BUT SNE DIDN'T CARE! THIS WAS HER LAST DAY AND SHE WAS JUST ITCHIHG FOR AN OPPORTUNITY TO TELL HIM OFF! ANYWAY, BY THE END OF THE DAY, TNEY WERE AT EACH OTNER'S THROATS!

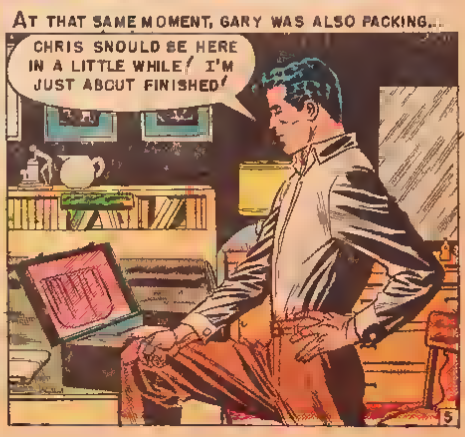

WELL! I'M CERTAINLY GLAD THIS DAY IS OVER WITH! I CAN'T WAIT TO GET OUT OF HERE!
NATURALLY!... SO YOU CAN MEET GARY, YOUR HANDSOME LOVER! SO YOU CAN RUN OFF AND GET MARRIED ON MY MONEY!

WHA... ? HOW DID...? YOU FOLLOWED ME! YOU SLIMY LITTLE SNEAK!
OOH'T CALL ME NAMES, YOU LYING, CHEATING, GOLD-DIGGER!

WELL, THAT DOES IT! YOU CRUMMY LOVE-SICK LITTLE JERK! I WOULDN'T STAY NERE ANOTHER MINUTE, NO MATTER WHAT YOU PAID ME!
...FILTHY, DOUBLE-CROSSING, WOMAH!

OH, SHUT UP! YOU SHOULD BE TNANKFUL I GAVE A GOON LIKE YOU ANY AFFECTION AT ALL!
WHY ARE YOU OOING THIS TO ME? I'VE BEEH SO GOOO TO YOU!

YOU GOT WHAT YOU PAID FOR! IT'S ALL OVER NOW, AND I DON'T KNOW HOW I PUT UP WITN YOU THIS LONG! I'M PACKING! I HOPE I NEVER SEE YOU OR YOUR STATUES AGAIN!


AT THAT SAME MOMENT, GARY WAS ALSO PACKING...
CHRIS SNOULD BE HERE IN A LITTLE WHILE! I'M JUST ABOUT FINISHED!

SEVERAL HOURS PASSED..

SHE PROBABLY HAD TO WORK LATE! OF ALL NIGHTS..! OH, WELL.. NOTHING TO DO BUT WAIT!

GARY SAT DOWN IN A CHAIR AND SLEPT! WHEN HE AWOKE...

LUVVA MIKE! IT'S ALMOST FOUR A.M. AND CHRIS ISN'T HERE YET! *SOMETHING* MUST HAVE DETAINED HER! SHE WOULDN'T BE LATE *TONIGHT* IF SHE COULD HELP IT! I'LL.. I'LL GIVE HER A FEW MORE HOURS...

BUT WHEN EIGHT O'CLOCK CAME AND CHRISTINE STILL HADN'T SHOWN UP, GARY WENT TO GEORGE'S STUDIO.

I'M LOOKING FOR CHRISTINE! WHERE IS SHE?

CHRISTINE? I HAVEN'T SEEN HER SINCE YESTERDAY!

YOU MEAN SHE WASN'T HERE LAST NIGHT?

OF COURSE NOT! WE FINISHED OUR WORK ABOUT SIX P.M.! SHE DRESSED, PACKED HER THINGS.. AND LEFT! WHY ARE *YOU* SO CONCERNED?

SHE WAS TO MEET ME LAST NIGHT, BUT NEVER SHOWED UP! I'M WORRIED!

OH! YOU MUST BE *GARY.*" SHE TOLD ME ALL ABOUT YOU! NOW I CAN SEE WHY SHE PREFERS YOU TO ME! I...I WAS STUPID TO THINK SHE COULD LOVE ME!

NEVER MIND THAT STUFF NOW! WHERE *IS* SHE?!

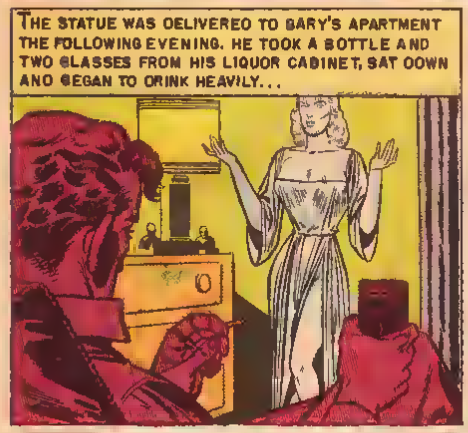
I DON'T KNOW! WE DID QUARREL BECAUSE OF YOU, BUT NOTHING..EN... *VIOLENT.*" I SAW I COULDN'T CHANGE HER MIND AND SHE LEFT! I HOPE NOTHING'S *HAPPENED* TO HER!

HEH, HEH! GARY SEARCHED *EVERYWHERE*...BUT HE COULDN'T FIND CHRISTINE! HE EVEN HAD THE COPS INVESTIGATE... BUT THEY, TOO, COULD FIND NO TRACE OF HER! MONTHS PASSED, AND GARY GAVE UP HOPE OF EVER SEEING HER AGAIN!

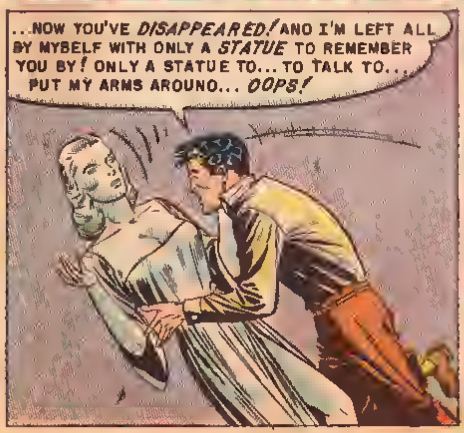
SAD AND LONELY, GARY AGAIN VISITED CEDRIC. . .
OH, HELLO, GARY! HEAR ANYTHING NEW ABOUT CHRISTINE?
NO. THE POLICE HAVE CLOSED THE CASE! I'LL NEVER SEE HER AGAIN! BUT... THAT SILVER STATUE OF HER...

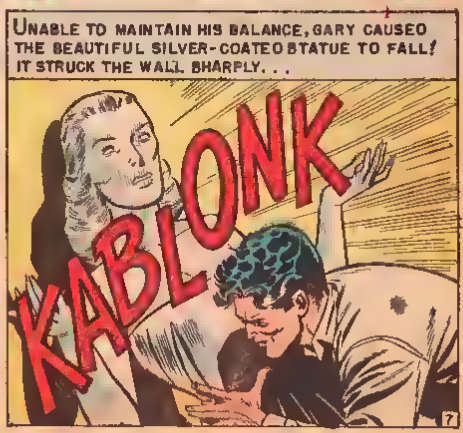
OH, THAT! I FINISHED IT THE NIGHT CHRISTINE DISAPPEARED! IT'S BEAUTIFUL, ISN'T IT?
YES... IT IS! I... I WANT TO BUY IT! WOULD YOU SELL IT?

WELL, YES! BUT IT WOULD COST YOU A GREAT DEAL OF MONEY!
THAT'S ALL RIGHT! I CAME HERE TO BUY IT, AND PRICE DOES NOT MATTER! IT'LL BE... SORT OF A REMEMBRANCE!


THE STATUE WAS DELIVERED TO GARY'S APARTMENT THE FOLLOWING EVENING. HE TOOK A BOTTLE AND TWO GLASSES FROM HIS LIQUOR CABINET, SAT DOWN AND BEGAN TO DRINK HEAVILY...

SILENTLY, HE SAT GAZING AT THE STATUE, DRAINING FIRST "HIS" GLASS, THEN "HERS"! IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE HE BEGAN TO FEEL THE EFFECTS...
CHRIS...CHRIS, WHERE ARE YOU? WHAT HAPPENED, BABY? YOU KNOW I LOVE YOU! WE.. WE WERE GOING TO BE SO HAPPY, BUT NOW...


...NOW YOU'VE DISAPPEARED! AND I'M LEFT ALL BY MYSELF WITH ONLY A STATUE TO REMEMBER YOU BY! ONLY A STATUE TO... TO TALK TO... PUT MY ARMS AROUND... OOPS!


UNABLE TO MAINTAIN HIS BALANCE, GARY CAUSED THE BEAUTIFUL SILVER-COATED STATUE TO FALL! IT STRUCK THE WALL SHARPLY. . .
KABLONK

WITH DIFFICULTY, GARY MANAGED TO STAND THE STATUE UPRIGHT AGAIN! IT WASN'T UNTIL THEN THAT HE SAW AN OBJECT LYING ON THE RUG

OH, MY GOSH! I'VE BROKEN THE STATUE'S *HAHD*! WONDER IF I CAN PUT IT BACK ON! I'LL HAVE TO TRY!

HE STODD BEFORE THE STATUE .. AND SUDDENLY, AN EXPRESSION OF *HORROR* ELECTRIFIED HIS FACE..

WHAT THE..?! INSIDE THE STATUE! A HAND! A HUMAH HAHD!

A TERRIFYING THOUGHT RUSHED INTO HIS MIND! QUICKLY, HE GATHERED TOOLS AND BEGAN TO PRY OPEN THE STATUE'S *HEAD*!

OH, LORD! DON'T LET IT BE WHAT I THINK! *PLEASE*, LORD...

THE METAL SPLIT OPEN AND FELL AWAY IN TWO PIECES, UNVEILING THE *ROTTED, DECAYED, PUTRID-SMELLING HEAD OF A WOMAH!* THERE WAS NO DOUBT WHO SHE WAS .. FOR, TO GARY, THE FLAMING RED HAIR WAS THE *MOST POSITIVE* IDENTIFICATION!

-THE END-

HEH, HEH, HEH! THOSE OF YOU WHO THINK A BODY CAN'T BE *ELECTRO-PLATED: HEAR THIS!* CEDRIC FIRST COMPLETELY SMEARED CHRISTINE WITH *ALUMIHUM PAIHT*.. WHICH MADE HER A *CONDUCTOR OF ELECTRICITY!* BUT DON'T TRY IT ON ANY OF YOUR FRIENDS... IT'LL MAKE THINGS A LITTLE *HARD* FOR THEM! CHRISTINE WAS A VERY INCONSIDERATE PERSON—BUT SHE BECAME A *CHIP OFF THE OL' BLOCK.. IN THE END!* HEH, HEH! NOW, GET READY FOR A TALE BY THAT BIG *BLOCKHEAD*, THE *CRYPT-KEEPER*!

THE CRYPT OF TERROR

GREETINGS, BORES AND GHOULS! WELCOME TO THE *CRYPT* AGAIN! YEP, IT'S YOUR *TELLER OF TERROR TALES, THE CRYPT-KEEPER, SPOOKING!* AFTER THAT *FAIRY TALE* OF *THE VAULT-KEEPER'S*... I REALLY FEEL *SORRY* FOR YOU! SO I'LL TELL YOU ONE OF MY MY MOST *HORRIBLE YARNS* TO *MAKE UP!* IT'S ABOUT AN *OLD MAN* WHO ALWAYS DRIVES A *BLACK-DRAPED, OLD FASHIONED*... WELL... I'LL BEGIN AT THE *BEGINNING*... WITH THE *TITLE!* I CALL IT...

PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN BRASS HEARSES...

THE HORSE SNORTS AS IT MOVES ALONG THE MAIN STREET HAULING THE OLD FASHIONED, BLACK-VELVET DRAPED HEARSE-WAGON BEHIND IT! THE DRIVER SITS STIFFLY, HIS FACE PALE AND DRAWN! CHILDREN LOPE ALONG BESIDE THE FUNERAL CART, YELLING UP AT THE EXPRESSIONLESS GRIM-FACED REIN-HOLDER...

BUT MR BYRD'S EXPRESSION OOESN'T CHANGE! HE JUST SITS THERE LISTENING TO THE KIDS' INSULTS ARO JIBES, MOVING THROUGH THE SMALL-TOWN MAIN STREET! FINALLY, HE REINS UP THE BLACK-DRAPEO HEARSE BEFORE THE GENERAL STORE .
AFTERNOON, LIONEL! WHAT'LL IT BE TODAY?
USUAL, EO! SACK OF FLOUR! SACK OF SUGAR! CAN OF SHORTNIN'! BOTTLE OF TOILET WATER BEANS...
OLD LIONEL BYRD NEVER BUDGES! HE OICTATES NIS ORDER TO EO, THE STOREKEEPER, AND WAITS ON HIS PERCH IN THE ORIVER'S SEAT OF THE HEARSE TILL IT IS BROUGHT OUT AND STOWED IN THE BACK...
OKAY, LIONEL! THAT'S THE LOT! THAT'LL BE $12.80 AS USUAL!
TNANKS, ED! NERE Y'ARE! BE SEEIN' YUH!
TNEN MR BYRD CRACKS HIS WHIP AND, TURNING THE OLD-FASHIONEO FUNERAL WAGON AROUND, HEAOS ON OUT OF THE SMALL NEW ENGLAND TOWN ONCE AGAIN .
'BYE, MR. BYRO!
SEE YOU NEXT MONTH, MR. BYRO!
KEEP OUT O' JAIL... BYRO!
THE SHRILL CAT-CALLS OF THE CHILDREN ORIFT AFTER LIONEL BYRO AS HE ANO HIS STRANGE VEHICLE OISAPPEAR UP THE OUSTY OIRT ROAD BEYONO THE TOWN LIMITS...
CRAZY OLO BYRD! ALWAYS ORIVIN' THAT NEARSE WAGON!
HE AIN'T NO UNOER-TAKER! HOW COME!
SEARCH ME! I OUNNO! NOBOOY KNOWS!
HEH, NEH! YES, OEAR READERS... NOBODY IN THAT TOWN KNOWS WHY OLD LIONEL BYRO ORIVES THAT HEARSE WAGON... WHY HE NEVER COMES INTO TOWN WITHOUT IT... WHY HE REFUSES TO GET OFF IT WHEN HE OOES COME IN ON HIS RARE MONTHLY VISITS! HEH, HEH! NOBODY, THAT IS, BUT ME...
ALL THE TOWNSFOLK KNOW IS THAT HE DROVE INTO TOWN LIKE THAT ABOUT A YEAR AGO! OIDN'T SAY WHERE HE CAME FROM! JUST RENTEO AN OLO OESERTEO NOUSE WAY UP IN THE WOODS! WHEN THE KIOS WENT NOSING AROUNO UP THERE...
GOSH! HE'S GOT THE WINOOWS ALL COVERED UP!
I'M SCAREO OF HIM!
LET'S GO!
AT FIRST, EVERYBODY MISTRUSTED OLD LIONEL! THEY DIDN'T LIKE THE WAY HE SECLUDEO HIMSELF! NOBOOY EVER SAW HIM EXCEPT FOR WHEN HE'O COME INTO TOWN, ORIVING THE HEARSE...
HE'S CRAZY, THAT'S WHAT HE IS! NE OUGHT TO BE RUN OUT OF TNE COUNTRY!
HE AIN'T HARMIN' ANYBODY, JER! AIN'T NO LAW SAYS YUH CAN'T USE AN OLD HEARSE TRIOE ROUND IN!
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ED, THE STOREKEEPER, USED TO GET *MAD* WHEN OLD LIONEL DROVE INTO TOWN! OLD MR. BYRO WOULD *REFUSE* TO GET *DOWN OFF THE HEARSE!* HE *DEMANDED* THAT ED COME *OUT* FROM HIS STORE AND *TAKE HIS ORDER*.

THE STORE'S *INSIDE*, MISTER! *HOP* OUT ON THE *STREET*! YOU WANTA *BUY* SOMETHIN', YOU COME *IN* AND *BUY* IT!

I GOT MY *REASONS* FOR *STAYIN'* UP HERE, ED! YOU WANTA *SELL* ME SOME VITTLES OR *HOT*?

BUT AFTER A WHILE THE TOWNSFOLK GOT *USED* TO QUEER OLD MR. BYRO! AFTER ALL, THEY ONLY *SAW* HIM ONCE A MONTH! AND NOBODY EVER WENT TO *VISIT* HIM UP THERE WHERE HE LIVED! EVEN ED DIDN'T MIND WAITING ON HIM OUT IN THE STREET AFTER A WHILE.

JUST PUT THE STUFF IN THE BACK, ED!

SURE THING, LIONEL!

THE KIDS USED TO PEER INTO THE HEARSE WHILE ED WAS LOADING IT WITH THE PURCHASES.

SHUCKS! HE AIN'T GOT *ANYTHING* IN THERE!

YEAH? I'LL BET THERE'S SOMETHIN' BEHIND THAT *CURTAIN!*

HEH, HEH! YEP! OLD LIONEL HAS THE HEARSE PARTITIONED OFF WITH A CURTAIN! WANT TO KNOW WHAT'S BEHIND IT? OKAY! I'LL TELL YOU! FOR THE STORY, WE'LL HAVE TO GO BACK A BIT... BACK TO THE TIME BEFORE HE EVER CAME TO THAT SMALL NEW ENGLAND TOWN IN HIS STRANGE VEHICLE...

BACK THEN, BACK BEFORE HE EVEN *OWNED* THE OLD FASHIONED HEARSE, LIONEL LIVED IN A LONELY CABIN WAY UP IN THE MOUNTAINS IN ANOTHER COUNTY! ONE DAY, TWO MEN CAME TO THE CABIN...

LOOK, NICK! SMOKE COMIN' OUT!

SOMEBODY LIVES THERE, RED!

THE TWO MEN THAT CAME TO LIONEL'S CABIN WAY UP IN THE MOUNTAINS WERE STRANGERS TO THOSE PARTS! THEY KNEW NOTHING ABOUT LIONEL BYRO! THEY WERE FUGITIVES.. FUGITIVES FROM THE LAW.

WINDOWS ARE COVERED! CAN'T SEE WHO'S INSIDE!

C'MON! LET'S KNOCK!

SO THE FUGITIVES, RICK AND RED, KNOCKED ON THE BYRO CABIN DOOR! A VOICE ANSWERED...

WAIT A MINUTE! I'LL BE READY IN A MINUTE!

THIS LOOKS LIKE A NICE SPOT TO HIDE OUT FOR A WHILE, NICK!

YOU'RE RIGHT, RED!

FINALLY, THE VOICE INSIDE THE CABIN SOUNDED AGAIN
ALL RIGHT! YOU CAN COME IN NOW!
GO AHEAD, NICK!
NICK PUSHED OPEN THE CABIN DOOR! HE PEERED INTO THE GLOOM! OLD MR. BYRD SAT ON A BENCH BEFORE A DRAPED DOORWAY.
WHO ARE YOU TWO?
HELLO, OLD TIMER!
MAYBE YOU CAN HELP US!
RED CLOSED THE DOOR BEHIND THEM.
HELP YOU? YOU LOST?
ER... YEAH! THAT'S IT! LOST!
YEAH! OUR CAR BROKE DOWN!
SUDDENLY, THE STILL MOUNTAIN AIR OUTSIDE THE CABIN WAS SPLIT WITH THE KNIFING SOUND OF BAYING HOUNDS...
HICK! THE BLOOD HOUNDS!
I DIDN'T THINK THEY WERE SO CLOSE!
BLOOD HOUNDS! YOU ..YOU CRIMIHALS!
THE BAYING HOWLS DREW CLOSER! NICK WHIPPED OUT A KNIFE AND HELD IT AGAINST THE OLD MAN'S THROAT...
YEAH, OLD TIMER! WE'RE CRIMIHALS! KILLERS! AND WE'LL KILL YOU IF YOU LET ON WE'RE IN HERE!
GO TO THE DOOR! TELL 'EM YOU AIN'T SEEH US!
NO! I AIN'T MOVIN'!
LISTEN, OLD TIMER! YOU DO AS WE SAY OR I'LL SLIT YOUR THROAT!
I'M NOT BUGGIN'! I.. I
THEY WERE RIGHT OUTSIDE... NICK AND RED'S PURSUERS! THEY WERE HAMMERING ON OLD MAN BYRD'S DOOR..
OPEN UP! IT'S SHERIFF ALLEN!
S'HELP ME, OLD MAN.
WHAT IS IT, HERB? ANYTHING WROHG?

WE'RE HUNTIN' DOWN SOME KILLERS! YOU SEEN 'EM!
I'LL KILL YOU, OLD MAN
N-NO, HERB! AIN'T SEEN 'EM! AIN'T SEEN 'EM AT ALL!
THE BAYING SOUNDS DISAPPEARED DOWN THE MOUNTAINSIDE. NICK AND RED BREATHED SIGHS OF RELIEF...
YOU WERE SMART, OLD MAN! YOU DID RIGHT!
NOW, GO! LEAVE!
DON'T BE CRAZY, OLD MAN! WE'RE GONNA HIDE OUT HERE!
NO! NO, YOU CAN'T!
OH CAN'T WE? NICK! GIMME YOUR GUN!
WH-WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
WE'RE GOING TO KILL YOU, YOU STUPID OLD @#!%!
NO... I...
BLAM.
BLAM!
OLD MR. BYRD SLUMPED FORWARD... DEAD...
N-NOW WHAT, RED?
WE BURY HIM... OUTSIDE!
THEY LEFT MR. BYRD'S CORPSE AND WENT OUT BEHIND THE CABIN. THEY BEGAN TO DIG A SHALLOW GRAVE
WE'LL HOLE UP HERE UNTIL THINGS COOL OFF. THEN WE'LL HEAD INTO CANADA!
GOOD IDEA! AW, THAT'S DEEP ENOUGH! C'MON! LET'S GO GET HIM!
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RED AND NICK WENT BACK INSIDE! AS THEY CAME THRDUGH THE DDDR THEY GASPED..
HDLY ..!
HE AIN'T DEAD! BUT.. I PUMPED TWD 45'S INTO HIM!
LIONEL SAT UPON THE BENCH BEFORE THE CURTAINED DDORWAY, HIS SHOTGUN POINTED AT THE TWO FUGITIVES.
SHE'S DOUBLE-BARRELED, YDU MURDERIN' RATS! ONE SHELL FOR EACH OF YOU!
D-DON'T SHOOT, OLD TIMER!
WE...WE DIDN'T MEAN TO .
SUDDENLY RED LDDKED DOWN! HIS EYES WIDENED IN HDRROR! A SCARLET POOL OF BLOOD DOZED OUT FROM BENEATH THE DDORWAY DRAPE ..
LOOK! LOOK, NICK!
BLOOD! BUT HE AIN'T BLEEDIN'!
NO! I'M NOT BLEEDIN!
LIONEL LDDKED AT THE TWO MEN..
YOU DIDN'T KILL ME! YOU KILLED MY TWIN!
YOUR... YOUR TWIN!
YES! MY—MY SIAMESE TWIN!
GDDD LDRD!
LIONEL GOT TO HIS FEET! HE MOVED AWAY FROM THE DDORWAY .
YAAAAAHHH! EEAGGHH!
THERE, ATTACHED TO LIONEL'S BACK, WAS THE BDDY OF HIS SIAMESE TWIN ..TWISTED GRDTESQUELY.. DEAD ..
ALL OUR LIVES WE'VE LIVED HERE! EVERY-BODY KNEW ABDUT US! EVERYBODY BUT YOU!
WHAT ..WHAT ARE YOU GDING TO DO TO US?

LIONEL BEGAN TO TIE THE TWO KILLENS UP . BACK TO BACK...

THERE! NOW YOU'LL KNOW THE *HELPLESSNESS* WE KNEW...MY *BROTHER* AND *I*...

THEN HE PUSHED THEM OUT OF THE CABIN AND INTO THE SHALLOW GRAVE THEY'D DUG FOR HIM...

WE'VE BEEN *BURIED* FROM *SOCIETY* ALL THESE YEARS! *BURIED ALIVE*... JUST AS *YOU* ARE GOING TO BE!

NO! NO!

HAVE MERCY!

BUT LIONEL SHOWED NO MERCY! THE SOFT BLACK EARTH CHOKED OFF NED AND NICK'S SCREAMS AS LIONEL FILLED THEIR GRAVE—

YAAA...GGG...

EEE...NHN..

HEH, HEH! YEP! NOBODY IN THAT SMALL NEW ENGLAND TOWN KNOWS *WHY* LIONEL BYRD SITS ON HIS *HEARSE* ...NEVER GETS *DOWN* FROM IT! BUT *WE* KNOW...*DON'T* WE, KIDDIES? LIONEL *HAD TO BUY THAT HEARSE* AFTER HIS *SIAMESE TWIN'S DEATH!* WHEN LIONEL *CAME* TO THE SMALL NEW ENGLAND TOWN, HIS *TWIN'S BODY* WAS IN THE BACK...BEHIND THE CURTAIN! AND *EVERY* TIME HE COMES INTO TOWN, IT'S *THERE!* YOU..YOU *LOOK* LIKE YOU DON'T *BELIEVE* ME! WELL, JUST SIT TIGHT! LIONEL'S COMING UP THE ROAD *NOW!*

THERE! HE'S IN FRONT OF HIS OLD HOUSE WAY OUT OF TOWN...THE ONE WITH THE CURTAINED-UP WINDOWS! SEE HOW HE LOOKS AROUND... MAKING SURE PRYING EYES AREN'T WATCHING! NOW...NOW HE'S GETTING DOWN! THERE! *TAKE A GOOD LOOK...*

WELL, AFTER ALL! LIONEL'S TWIN *HAS* BEEN *DEAD A YEAR!* *ANY BODY* WOULD START *DECAYING* BY *THEN!* WHAT DO YOU THINK THE *TOILET WATER* IS FOR? AND THAT'S MY *STORY*, FIENDS! *NOW* I'LL TURN YOU BACK TO THE *VAULT-KEEPER!* HIS *COLUMN*, WHICH CONTAINS INFORMATION ON OBTAINING *ACTUAL PHOTOS OF UR GHOULUNATICS* FOLLOWS THE *TEXT* WHICH FOLLOWS *ME!* 'BYE, NOW! *REMEMBER!* A MAN'S *NEARSE* IS HIS.. HEH, HEH!

—THE END—

E.C. FANS!

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TREASURE!

Through the murky blue-green water near the bottom of the reef, Henderson could dimly make out his partner's bulky form moving about clumsily in the diving suit. The oyster-bed for which they had organized this Pacific venture was a complete failure so far . . . it might even be that the tattered map they had bought was a *fraud!* For 2 days now Henderson and his colleague had been plunging into these waters, hoping to discover the fabulous oyster bed said to house a treasure in black pearls . . . for 2 days they had been searching in vain! Unless they found what they had come so many thousands of miles for, the expedition was going to prove awfully costly. And there was always the danger of encountering one of the huge octopi said to lurk in these tropical waters . . .

A swirl of bubbles made Henderson lurch around and face his partner, who was pointing excitedly with one gloved hand. Henderson ponderously crossed the ocean floor; one glimpse was enough. A huge oyster, its top clamping shut even as he watched, had revealed for a moment the presence of a gleaming pearl! The partner moved toward it, his sharp knife ready to cut the oyster from the reef . . .

Before the man had a chance to defend himself, Henderson swung savagely and sent the man spinning groggily to the ocean floor. Moving swiftly, despite his weighty diving suit, Henderson jammed his dagger into the man's chest . . . felt the blade tear through the cloth top of the diving-suit . . . knew the steel

had plunged home with deadly effect. Henderson stood erect and grinned. The pearls they had discovered were all *his*...

The natives up in the boat might begin to ask Henderson questions about his partner, so he diligently ripped loose the air-line and watched it float off through the murky water. When he surfaced, he'd tell the boys that his partner had been killed by an octopus...

His knife ready to slice free the oysters, Henderson whirled in terror as a gigantic shadowy form flickered toward him. Before he could yank on his safety-line, a long sinuous tentacle reached out and circled his arm. He recoiled with revulsion, slashing out frantically with his knife, but he was being completely engulfed by a hideous rubbery mass which was all around him in the same instant. Just before he felt the air-line break, Henderson screamed aloud... *OCTOPUS*...

Squirming loose from the paralyzing grip was impossible, Henderson realized in panic. The pressure was unbearable... his breath was strangling in his throat. Then two hideous eyes... something out of a nightmare... moved close to Henderson's face, and a grotesque mouth opened ominously...

A blinding pain rocketed through his body and Henderson blanked-out. When he came-to, he seemed to be floating semi-consciously through a haze of indescribable agony. With horror that almost made his heart stop beating, he saw what had happened to make him faint. *His left leg had been torn from his body*... and now a savage tentacle was closing around his other leg.

Henderson felt a tortuous wrenching and tearing... and he prayed for a quick death ...prayed that this being devoured piece by piece would be over in another second...

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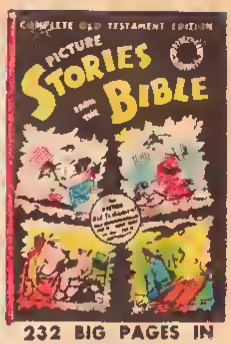

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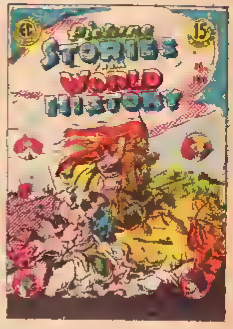

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THE VAULT-KEEPER'S CORNER

NO! NO! Not again! I won't DO it! I WON'T! My readers aren't interested in answers to that dang letter I was good enough to give you space to run two issues back! I gave you HALF MY COLUMN last issue! That's ENOUGH already! (*But V K! Those were only the first few replies that came in! We've had THOUSANDS since! We've GOT to print more!* —ed.) Aw you'll only print the ones that agree with you, anyway! (*No, V K! We've got THREE that agree with Mrs. Phelan!* —ed.) YOU HAVE? (*Sure! An we'll even print those FIRST!* —ed.) And you'll give me what you promised? (*If we can locate one!* —ed.) Oh Goody! A brand new BLADE for my GUILLOTINE! The old one's all corroded from blood! I MUST remember to clean THIS one every time I use it

Dear Editors

I heartily agree with Mrs. Phelan in calling your magazines dirt and filth! As to their being shameful I don't think you could truthfully deny this.—E. Manning—N.Y.C.

I agree with Mrs. Phelan strongly. I do not think that you live up to your trademark, for I have hardly been "entertained" by your comics. I am sure that you'd be able to make ample money by writing stories according to the "Legion of Decency".—P.O. Hagan—(no address given)

I realize it's a million dollar business robbing candy from babies. . . we can't make people stop reading the trash, but if it wasn't published, then they wouldn't have to. There are so many, many cute stories that could be published. I can't understand how you sleep nights thinking of how you tempt children's ten cent pieces from them by feeding their little minds with these horrible stories.—Mrs. R.K. Colgin—San Francisco, Calif.

I wonder what's a good polish for guillotine blades! (*Hold on a minute, V K! There're more letters from fans who do NOT agree with Mrs. Arline Grandon Phelan of Konsos City!* —ed.)

That letter from Mrs. Phelan was enough to make anyone regurgitate.—Mrs. Loranza F. White—Miranda City, Texas

If Mrs. Phelan had read some of your war issues she would have noticed that you received letters from boys in Korea who are sacrificing their lives to keep her safe and sound in her home so she can forbid her children to read magazines that explain the truth and hell of war.—Dorothy E. Podolick—St. Clair, Pa.

Mrs. Phelan's neighbors must have shaken their heads after reading their latest issue of The Vault of Horror! Thank the Lord my mother is more broad-minded. She herself can hardly wait for the next issue.—Johnny Knisely—Pleasant Hill, Ohio

This woman from Konsos states that your "trash" will not only warp little junior's mind, but turn him into a juvenile delinquent. Has she ever seen how a criminal ends in one of your stories? He is either led away a raving maniac or devoured by some strange and hideous creature or worse! If this furthers her son's hopes to be a delinquent, then his reasoning powers need some fast retreading!—C. Fanning—Orange, N.J.

. . . She says that only a "low-type-person" could derive any enjoyment from that trash. In that case, I guess my mother and father, my brothers and sisters, and all of my relatives are low type persons, for we all enjoy your "shameful, horrid, and disgraceful" magazines.—Judith Tripp—Johnson City, N.Y.

. . . The least I can say is that Mrs. Phelan is being rather unfair and very assinine.—Mary Margaret Bye—Carthage, Mo.

She probably just wanted to get her name into an E.C. mag.—Bob Hoopengarner—Kansas City, Mo.

. . . I am in favor of raising Merry Hearts and abolishing the Bluenoses.—D.C. MacLarty—Baltimore, Md.

. . . She can jump, jump in the lake.—Hardy Myers—(no address given)

. . . She has rocks in her head.—Ralph Becker—Chicago, Ill.

She can go fly a kite!—Hector M. Cuellar—Laredo, Texas

I think Mrs. Phelan is a little off her roller.—Felix Camps III—(no address given)

She's a screwball.—George Ramming—Union City, N.J.

I have two children, eight and fifteen years old. They could do a lot worse than just read horror stories.—Mrs. L. Collins—Oxford, N.J.

I think you should let Mrs. Phelan know that the boys who fought for freedom and lost arms and legs should be the first in my opinion to say whether your books should be outlawed. Over half the patients at McGuire Veterans Hospital here read them. I think she has a nerve.—Mrs. J.L. Rakes—Richmond, Va.

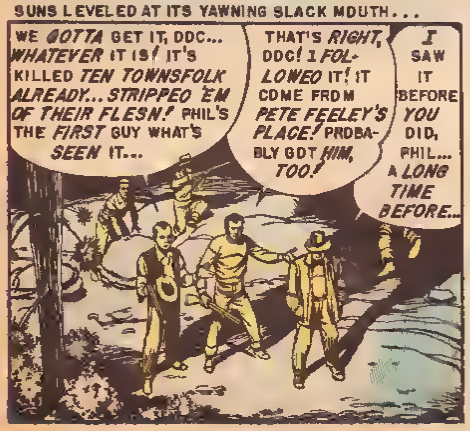
How about DRIED MUMMY DUST? Will THAT polish a guillotine blade nice? (*Oh, VERY nice!* —ed.) Are you guys through? Can I have my column back? (*Sure, V K! Take it away!* —ed.) Well, THANKS! It's about PASTEL-COLORED ANEMIC VAMPIRES! There's hardly any column left to take away! (*Oh, there's enough to announce that E.C.'s second annual TALES OF TERROR anthology is still available, containing 16 E.C. yarns originally published in 1951! 128 pages of great entertainment for 25c! And there's enough room to announce that the sets of five by seven autographed photographic reproductions of you, C.K. and O.W. are still 25c, also that subscriptions are available, 75c six issues, come in envelopes!* —ed.) Highway robbery, overpriced, don't waste your money!

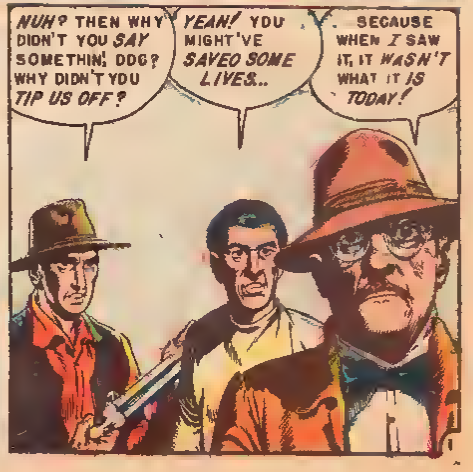
Mail wasted money, criticisms, complaints, suggestions, picture orders, T. of T. orders, and subscription orders with your clearly printed name and address to:

The Vault-Keeper
Room 706, Dept. 27
225 Lafayette St.
N.Y.C. 12, N.Y.

YOU MIGHT SAY THAT THIS TERROR-TALE IS STRICTLY FROM HUNGER!

THE POSSE STOOD BEFORE THE CAVE ENTRANCE, THEIR GUNS LEVELED AT ITS YAWNING BLACK MOUTH...





YOU BETTER START TALKIN', OOC' AR' TALK FAST!
FIRST DO WHAT I SAY! THEN I'LL TELL YOU 'BOUT IT! QUICK! GET A FINE BUILT! A BIG ONE!
SOON, A CRACKLING FINE CARGED BEFORE THE CAVE ENTRANCE! THE POSSE MEMBERS STOOD AROUND OOC CHAMBERS, GLARING AT HIM ANGRILY...
OKAY, DOC' THERE'S YOUR FINE." NOW GET ON WITH IT! IT'S GETTIN' DARK!
YOU SAY YOU FOLLOWED IT FROM PETE FEELEY'S PLACE... EH, PHIL?
THAT'S RIGHT! I WAS COMIN' ACROSS THE VALLEY...
OID YOU SEE PETE?
SHUCKS, NO! WHEN THE THING COME OUT OF HIS CABIN, I HIGH-TAILED AFTER IT! I KNEW IT MUST'VE BEEN WHAT'S BEEN GOIN' THE KILLIN'S ROUND THESE PARTS!
THEN YOU DIDN'T SEE PETE? HAVE ANY OF YOU SEEN PETE FEELEY SINCE HE BECOME A RECLUSE?
WHY... NO! I AIN'T LAID EYES ON 'IM!
BEEN OVER A YEAR NOW!
OOC! YOU TRYIN' T' TELL US THAT... THAT THING IN THERE IS PETE FEELEY? LORD! THAT AIN'T NOTHIN' HUMAN!
NO! THAT ISN'T PETE FEELEY! NOT ACTUAL! YOU SEE...
'YOU SEE, PETE CAME TO ME MORE'N A YEAR AGO' HE WAS SCARED' HE SHOWED ME THIS LUMP ON HIS ARM.'
WHAT IS IT, OOC? IT'S.. IT'S GETTIN BIGGER EVERY DAY!
LOOKS LIKE A TUMON T'ME, PETE' A... A CANCER!
'PETE TURNED WHITE AS A GHOST' HE GOT REAL SCARED...'
A, A CANCER! AM I GONNA DIE, OOC?
OUNRO, PETE! DURNO... FOR SURE!" THERE'S TWO KINDS OF TUMORS! ONE'S MALIGNANT, IT'S BAD! THE OTHER'S BENIGN, IT'S GOOD! THE MALIGNANT ONE KEEPS GROWIN' TILL IT KILLS YOU! 'TAIN'T NO USE NEMOVIN' IT!' THE BERIGN ONE CAN BE CUT AWAY, AND THAT'S THE LAST OF IT!

WHICH ONE'S THIS, OOG? WHICH ONE?
DUNNO, PETE! I'LL HAVE TO TAKE SOME TESTS! SPINAL TAP! BLOOD SAMPLE!
'I SENT A SAMPLE OF PETE'S BLOOD AND A SPINAL TAP TO A BIG LAB IN CHATTANOOGA, AND THEY TOL' ME.'
SORRY, PETE! WON'T DO YOU NO GOOD CUTTIN' THIS TUMOR AWAY! IT'S MALIGNANT!
THEN - THEN I'M GONNA DIE?
'EVEN IN THE SHORT TIME IT TOOK TO GET BACK THE LAB REPORT, PETE'S TUMOR HAD GROWN.'
YEP! I'M AFRAID SO, PETE! I'D SAY.. TWO MAYBE THREE MONTHS
NO! NO! I OON' WANTA DIE! I'M SCARED O' OYIN'! I ..SOB.. I
'PETE STARTED BLUBBERIN' LIKE A BABY! HE REALLY WAS SCARED OF DYIN'! AN' THERE WAS NOTHIN' I COULD OO...'
TAKE IT EASY, PETE! THESE THINGS HAPPEN! WE JUS' GOTTA FACE 'EM!
NO! NO! I'LL GO TO BALD MOUNTAIN! I'LL SEE THE OLD HAG! I DON' WANTA DIE!
THE FIRE FLICKERED BEFORE THE CAVE ENTRANCE! THE POSSE STOOD AROUND, STARING AT OLD DOC CHAMBERS..
YOU MEAN THAT'S WHY WE AIN'T SEEN PETE FEELEY? 'CAUSE HE DIED?
NO! PETE DIDN'T DIE! HE DID WHAT HE SWORE! HE WENT UP TO OLD BALOY.. TO THE HAG
THAT PHONY! WHAT COULD SHE DO?
'THAT'S HOW I FELT! WHAT COULD SHE DO! SO I WENT TO SEE PETE A COUPLE OF MONTHS LATER, IT WAS HORRIBLE! HIS ARM HAD ALL BUT BEEN SWALLOWED UP BY THAT AWFUL TUMOROUS GROWTH! BY ALL RIGHTS HE SHOULDA BEEN ON HIS LAST LEGS...'
IT'S THE OLD HAG UP ON OLD BALOY, DOC! SHE SAID I AIN'T GONNA DIE! SHE PROMISED! WE MADE A DEAL!
IT'S - IT'S IMPOSSIBLE! THAT TUMOR SHOULD HAVE KILLED YOU LONG AGO!
'PETE'D GONE TO SEE HER! HE'D BEGGED HER TO HEX HIM SO'S HE WOULDN'T DIE! SHE'D REFUSED! BUT HE'D PLEADED UNTIL'
IF I DO IT - IF I HEX YOU SO'S YOU'LL NEVER DIE. WILL YOU MAKE A PROMISE TO ME? EH? HEE, HEE?
ANYTHING! ANYTHING AT ALL!
3

PROMISE ME YOU'LL NEVER ASK ME TO BREAK THE HEX! PROMISE ME YOU'LL NEVER COME BACK TO OLD BALDY! HEE, HEE! PROMISE?
I PROMISE! I SWEAR IT! ANYTHING... ONLY KEEP ME FROM DYIN'! I'M SCARED!
'SO THE OLD HAG WENT THROUGH HER INCANTATIONS AND BLACK ANTS JIBBERISH...
...AND PETE CAME DOWN FROM BALO MOUNTAIN HEXED!
GO ON! YOU 'SPECT US TO BELIEVE THAT NONSENSE, DOC?
IT'S TRUE! BY ALL RIGHTS, HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN DEAD!
DID YOU SEE PETE AGAIN AFTER THAT, DOC?
ONCE MORE! I WENT UP TO HIS PLACE ABOUT FOUR MONTHS AFTER HE'D FIRST COME TO SEE ME! I EXPECTED TO FIND HIS CORPSE... NOTHIN' MORE!
AND, DID YOU?
'HE WAS STILL ALIVE! BY THEN THE TUMOR'D SPREAD TO HIS BODY! IT WAS AWFUL... FRIGHTENING! I'D NEVER SEEN ANYTHING SO UGLY! AN I GOT A STRONG STOMACH...
'LO, DOC! GUESS YOU NEVER 'SPECTED TO FIND ME ALIVE!
N-NO! CHOKE! I... DIDN'T!
'WE TALKED FOR A WHILE! HE COMPLAINED...
THE ONLY THING IS I'M HUNGRY ALL THE TIME! I KEEP EATIN' LIKE A PIG!
YOU YOU NEED THE NOURISHMENT!

YDU SAY THAT'S THE LAST TIME YOU SAW PETE, DOC?
THAT'S RIGHT! I WENT UP ABOUT A MDNTH OR TWO AFTER THAT SECONO VISIT, BUT...
'...BUT HE WDULDN'T LET ME IN! HIS VOICE SOUNDED STNANGE...'
GO AWAY, DOC! GO AWAY! I'M ALL RIGHT! GO AWAY!
S-SUIT YERSELF, PETE!
'AND WHEN I TRIED ABOUT FOUR MONTHS AGO, HIS VOICE WAS INCOHERENT... A JUMBLED GANGLE...'
PETE! PETE! LET ME IN!
FOUN MONTHS AGO? YDU MEAN HE LIVED TNAT LONG?
I TNIED TO PEEN IN THE WINDOW TO SEE..BUT HE'D CURTAINED 'EM UP GDOD! WHEN THE KILLIN'S ANOUND HERE STANTED, I NEVEN TIED THE TWD THINGS TOGETHEN..
I THOUGHT IT WAS SDME ANIMAL! NDTHIN' ELSE WDULD STRIP A BODY OF ALL ITS FLESN LEAVIN' ONLY TNE BONES! THAT IS, NOTHIN' EXCEPT...WELL, WHEN PNIL SAID HE SEEN THE THING CDME FNOM PETE FEELEY'S PLACE, I KNEW...
WHAT IS IT, DOC? TELL US!
YDU KNDW WHAT A CANCER IS? IT'S A GROWTH...A BUNCH OF CELLS GONE CRAZY! THEY FEED ON NEALTNY CELLS AND GROW! THEY KEEP GROWIN'...GDIN' CRAZIER AND CRAZIER! AN' WHEN THEY'VE EATEN ENOUGN NEALTHY CELLS, THE NORMAL PERSON DIES!
BUT PETE COULONT OIE!
NO! SO THE GRDWTH FIN-ISNED OFF ALL NIS HEALTHY CELLS! AND IT NEEDED MORE HEALTHY CELLS! SO IT STARTED AFTER 'EM...OTNER PEOPLE'S! THAT THING IN THERE IS A LIVING TUMOR... A MASS OF CANCER CELLS GONE WILO...
LISTEN!
IT'S COMIN' OUT!

ALL EYES TURNED TOWARD THE CAVE MOUTH.. TOWARD THE SUCKING GULPING SOUND! THE FIRELIGHT DANCED ON ITS LIVID SHIMMERING FORM AS IT SLITHERED OUT.. A HUGE BLOB OF CANCEROUS PROTOPLASM

GOOD LORD!

YAAAAAAAAH!

THEY BEGAN FIRING AT IT... PUMPING BULLETS INTO ITS SLIMY ROLLING SURFACES

DOC CHAMBERS PICKED UP A FLAMING FAGGOT FROM THE FIRE

BULLETS WON'T KILL IT! NOTHING WILL KILL IT! WE'LL HAVE TO *DRIVE IT BACK INTO THE CAVE!*

C'MON! GRAB A *TORCH*.. *EVERY-BODY*...

THE HIDEOUS MASS OF DISEASED TISSUE RECOILED AS THE SEARING TORCHES WERE FLUNG AT IT..

FINALLY IT SLITHERED BACK INTO THE CAVE

NOW WHAT, DOC?

WE'VE GOT TO *BLOCK UP THE CAVE ENTRANCE!* SINCE WE CAN'T *KILL IT*, WE'VE GOT TO *IMPRISON* IT! GET SOME *DYNAMITE!*

DAWN FOUND THE CAVE MOUTH SEALED..

JUST *PRAY* NOBODY EVER *UNCOVERS* THIS ENTRANCE *THAT'S ALL!*

IT'S GOT TO *STAY* IN THERE *FOREVER!*

HEH, HEH! YEP! THAT'S *IT*, FIENDS! PETE FEELEY'S *CANCER GROWTH* IS *STILL SLITHERING AROUND* IN THAT *BLOCKED-UP CAVE* DOWN THERE IN THE GREAT SMOKYS! CARE TO GO *PROS-PECTIN'* WITH ME SOMETIME? WE MIGHT *DIG UP* SOMETHIN'... SOME-THIN' *MIGHTY HUNGRY!* AND NOW, I'LL TURN YOU OVER TO *THE OLD WITCH* FOR *HER FAIRY TALE! HO KIDDIN!* THIS TIME! 'BYE, NOW!

THE END

THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

NEE, NEE! YEP, IT'S YOUR *RENDERER OF REVOLTING RECIPES, THE OLD WITCH, COOKING* UP ANOTHER *CREEPY CONCOCTION* IN MY *GRUDGY CAULDRON*, SO COME ON INTO *THE HAUNT OF FEAR* AND I'LL *DISH OUT A PUTRID PORTION!* THIS TIME, I'VE *MIXED UP A MASTERPIECE* OF *MORBIDITY!* IT'S A DELIGHTFULLY DELIRIOUS YARN I CALL...

A *GRIM* FAIRY TALE!

GHASTLY

ONCE UPON A TIME, LONG AGO, THERE WAS A TINY KINGDOM! BUT THIS TINY KINGDOM WAS AN *UNHAPPY* TINY KINGDOM! FOR THIS PARTICULAR TINY KINGDOM WAS OVERRUN WITH *RATS!* IT WAS SO OVERRUN WITH RATS THAT THE PEOPLE OF THIS TINY KINGDOM HAD TO CARRY *STICKS* WHEN THEY WENT OUT OF THEIR HOUSES...

DADDY! I'M *AFRAID* OF THE RATS!

DON'T BE AFRAID OF THEM, MY SON! *I* WILL KEEP YOU FROM *HARM!*

THERE WERE ALL KINDS OF RATS' THERE WERE BROWN RATS...
...AND GREY RATS...
AND GREYISH-BROWN RATS...
...AND BROWNISH-GREY RATS...
GRAIN
THEY INVADED THE STREETS...
...THE SHOPS...
...THE HOUSES...
THEY ATE THE PEOPLE'S GARBAGE...
...THE PEOPLE'S FOOD...
...THE PEOPLE!
2

FINALLY THE PEOPLE OF THE KINGDOM COULDN'T STAND IT ANY LONGER! THEY DECIDED TO KILL OFF THE RAT POPULATION.. DESTROY THEM! SO ONE DAY, THEY ALL ARMED THEMSELVES WITH STICKS...BROOMS... ANYTHING USEABLE AS A WEAPON...
..AND THEY STARTED KILLING OFF THE RATS...
THEY KILLED OFF GREY RATS...
...AND BROWN RATS..
...AND GREYISH-BROWN RATS..
...AND BROWNISH-GREY RATS...
THEY KILLED OFF THE RATS THAT INVADED THE STREETS AND ATE THE PEOPLE'S GARBAGE..
...THE RATS THAT INVADED THE SHOPS AND ATE THE PEOPLE'S FOOD..
...AND THE RATS THAT INVADED THE HOUSES AND ATE THE PEOPLE!

NOW, IT SEEMS THAT THIS TINY KINGDOM WAS GOVERNED BY A POMPOUS KING AND HIS POMPOUS QUEEN...
THEY LIVED IN A POMPOUS CASTLE SURROUNDED BY A POMPOUS MOAT...
GREY RATS COULDN'T CROSS THE MOAT...
BROWN RATS COULDN'T CROSS THE MOAT..
GREYISH-BROWN RATS COULDN'T CROSS THE MOAT..
AND NEITHER COULD BROWNISH-GREY RATS CROSS THE MOAT!
SO THE POMPOUS KING AND THE POMPOUS QUEEN IN THEIR POMPOUS CASTLE SURROUNDED BY THE POMPOUS MOAT HAD NO RAT PROBLEM! IN FACT, THE ONLY PROBLEM THE POMPOUS QUEEN HAD WAS WHAT TO DO NEXT FOR HER LITTLE PET WHITE MICE...
AREN'T THEY CUTE, SIEGFRIED? I HAD THOSE DIAMOND COLLARS MADE SPECIAL.. JUST FOR THEM!
VERY CUTE, GWENDOLYN!
THE POMPOUS QUEEN LOVED HER PET WHITE MICE! SHE KEPT THEM IN A DIAMOND STUDDED GOLD CAGE.. SHE FED THEM FROM A DIAMOND-STUDDED GOLD FEEDING TRAY,.. SHE DRESSED THEM IN DIAMOND STUDDED GOLD COLLARS! THERE WASN'T ANYTHING THOSE LITTLE WHITE MICE LACKED...
GOOTCHIE...GOOTCHIE, YOU LITTLE DARLINGS! HERE, SWEETS! SOME ROAST PEASANT..
GWENDOLYN! COME...EAT!
4

AND THEN, ONE DAY, THE POMPOUS KING AND THE POMPOUS QUEEN LEARNED FROM THEIR POMPOUS LORD HIGH ADVISOR AND LEGAL-EAGLE THAT THE POPULACE HAD ALMOST CONQUERED THE RAT SITUATION...
THEY ARE KILLING THEM OFF WITH THEIR BARE HANDS! IT'S AMAZING!
AMAZING!
NO! NO! THEY MUSTN'T!
WHY NOT, GWENDOLYN, DEAR? THE RATS ARE A PROBLEM!
RATS ARE RELATED TO MICE, SIEGFRIED! I LOVE MY WHITE MICE! SO I LOVE THEIR COUSINS, TOO! I FORBID THE PEOPLE TO KILL THE RATS! IT'S CRUEL... I FORBID IT!
AND SO AN EDICT WAS READ ALL OVER THE TINY KINGDOM...
THEREFORE, BY ORDER OF QUEEN GWENDOLYN AND KING SIEGFRIED, IT IS A CRIMINAL OFFENSE TO KILL, MUTILATE, HARM, OR ANNOY ANY RAT IN THIS KINGDOM! VIOLATERS WILL BE PROSECUTED! PUNISHABLE BY A FINE... IMPRISONMENT... OR BOTH! ARTICLE 69, SECTION 8, PENAL LAW, KINGDOM OF .
...THE KILLING OF THE RATS WAS HALTED! SOON, THEY ONCE AGAIN BEGAN TO OVERRUN THE TINY KINGDOM...
ONCE AGAIN THEY BEGAN TO EAT THE PEOPLE'S GARBAGE...
...THE PEOPLE'S FOOD...
...AND THE PEOPLE!
EEEEEEEEEEEEE...
MY BABY!
5

AND ONCE AGAIN, THE PEOPLE COULD STAND IT NO LONGER! BUT THIS TIME THEY WEREN'T ALLOWED TO KILL THE RATS...
WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM?
HE'S BEING TAKEN TO PRISON!
HE KILLED A RAT!
AND THE RAT SITUATION GOT WORSE THAN EVER...
WE'RE STARVING!
THE RATS EAT ALL THE FOOD...
THE KING AND QUEEN WON'T LET US KILL THE RATS!
THEY LOVE RATS!
AND THE PEOPLE GOT ANGRIER AND ANGRIER...
WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING!
FOLLOW ME!
..TO THE CASTLE!
THE CROWD GREW LARGER AS IT MOVED THROUGH THE STREETS...
TO THE CASTLE...
TO THE RAT-LOVERS!
C'MON!
... THE PEOPLE WERE SHOUTING AND YELLING AS THEY NEARED THE CASTLE...
SOMEONE SWAM THE MOAT AND LET THE DRAWBRIDGE DOWN, AND THE CROWD STAMPEDED ACROSS...
. THE POMPOUS KING AND THE POMPOUS QUEEN WERE SURROUNDED IN THEIR POMPOUS THRONE-ROOM BY THE ANGRY MOB...
GO HOME! GO BACK TO YOUR HOUSES!
SEIZE THEM!

THE ANGRY CROWD SEIZED THE POMPOUS KING AND THE POMPOUS QUEEN...
STOP! STOP!
EEEEEEEE!
BRING THE RATS!
SOMEONE CAME FORWARD WITH A CAGE! INSIDE WERE TWO HALF-STARVED VICIOUS-LOOKING RATS.
HERE! HERE THEY ARE!
ONE LIVE RAT WAS FORCED INTO THE POMPOUS KING'S MOUTH...
...AND DOWN HIS THROAT! THE OTHER RAT WAS FORCED INTO THE POMPOUS QUEEN'S MOUTH...
...AND DOWN HER THROAT! THEN THEIR POMPOUS ROYAL MOUTHS WERE SEWN SHUT...
AND THE CROWD CHEERED AS LITTLE BY LITTLE, THE HUNGRY HALF-STARVED RATS ATE THEIR WAY OUT OF THE POMPOUS KING AND THE POMPOUS QUEEN..
AFTER THAT THE PEOPLE OF THE TINY KINGDOM KILLED OFF THE OTHER RATS AND LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER! NEE NEE! WELL, KIDDIES! THAT'S MY FAIRY TALE... AND IT WAS AS I SAID: PRETTY GRIM, EH? SO, THAT WINDS UP THE VAULT-KEEPER'S MAG FOR THIS ISSUE! WE'LL ALL SEE YOU NEXT IN MY MAG, THE HAUNT OF FEAR! BYE NOW! REMEMBER! IF YOU DON'T LIKE RATS.
AND WHAT HAPPENED TO GWENNY AND SIGGY. KEEP YOUR TRAP SHUT! HEE HEE!

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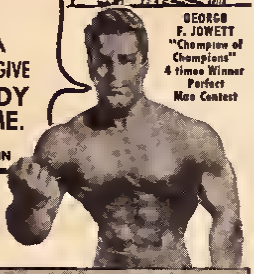

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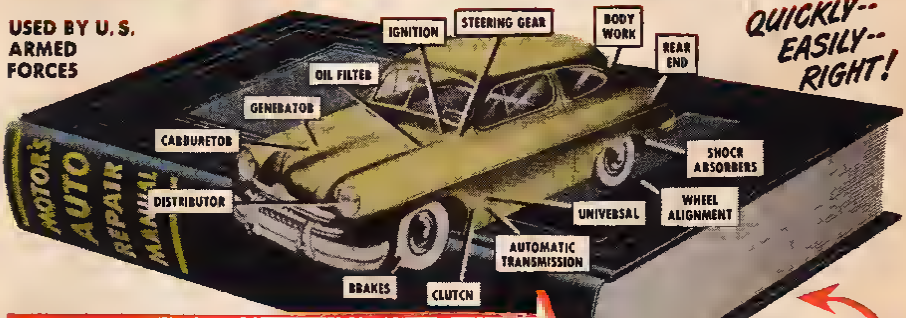

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